

## Transition from Foreign to North American Leadership in the Early Veterinary Colleges

**Author's note:** Though “dean” is used this article, the designated term at the time of the initial appointment was more usually “head” or “principal”. Similarly, the current names of the colleges and schools are used rather than the institutional names at the time.  
Donald F. Smith

By Dr. Donald F. Smith  
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European-educated veterinarians were inaugural deans for some of the earliest veterinary colleges in North America. As time passed and North American colleges produced more graduates, founding deans usually came from US and Canadian institutions. During the modern era, however, we again rely on a significant number of foreign-educated veterinarians to serve as dean.

North American veterinary colleges emerged in the middle decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many decades after the great veterinary colleges were established in Europe. Though many survived only a few years, some were very successful. One prominent college, the Ontario Veterinary College (originally in Toronto) remains to the present at the University of Guelph. The other lasting colleges from that era represented a cohort of nine land-grant institutions that began between 1879 and 1916, plus the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.



*James Law, graduate of Edinburgh's Veterinary College and first dean (principal) of veterinary medicine at Cornell University.*

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The founding leadership for these eleven colleges is described here.

**1860s:**

The Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) in Toronto was founded by Andrew Smith, an Edinburgh graduate (1862). Though the veterinary college at Cornell was not established until the 1890s, the founding dean was James Law, also from Edinburgh. He began teaching veterinary medicine there in 1868.

**1870s:**

Iowa State University (ISU) first offered veterinary courses in 1872, presented by the distinguished, German-educated, Heinrich J. Detmers. But a measure of the growing maturity of the fledgling profession in North America was the appointment in 1879 of its first dean, Milliken Stalker, who was an OVC graduate.

Though the University of Pennsylvania's first two deans were physicians from that university, the third dean (1879) was a former BS student of James Law at Cornell, who then received VMD from the University of Pennsylvania.

**1880s:**

The first dean at the Ohio State University's veterinary college was also Heinrich J. Detmers (1885).

**1890s:**

Washington State's first dean was a Danish-born ISU graduate, Sofus B. Nelson (1899).

**1900s:**

The three colleges established in this decade were all led by US-educated deans. At Kansas State, there was a short initial period of instruction by Heinrich Detmers, followed by courses given by graduates of the OVC, the Montreal Veterinary College, and the Chicago Veterinary College. Kansas State's first dean when it was established in 1905 was Francis Schoenleber, a graduate of the Chicago Veterinary College.

The deans of Auburn (1907) and Colorado State (1907), were also educated in the United States, both at ISU: Charles Allen Cary and George H. Glover, respectively.

**1910s:**

Michigan State's first dean (1910) was a Harvard veterinary graduate, Richard P. Lyman. At Texas A&M (1916), the dean was Mark Francis, who graduated in the first class from Ohio State.

In summary, of the eleven colleges in the US and Canada that were established around the turn of the century and have endured to the present, only three were established with leaders who

were educated primarily outside North America. Founding leadership of the other eight colleges was home-grown.

### **In the modern era:**

Foreign-born and foreign-educated veterinarians<sup>1</sup> again populate the deanships in some US and Canadian colleges, and currently these represent about 10% of the dean positions. The most recent such appointments are at the North Carolina State University (2012), Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine (2013), the University of Illinois (2014) and at the Ontario Veterinary College (2015). Though I don't believe they are tracked on a national level, the proportions of foreign faculty and postgraduate clinical trainees and graduate students are quite substantial in some colleges. Perhaps we are becoming a global community once again.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Educated to the veterinary degree in most cases, with postgraduate clinical and/or research education, and faculty experience, usually occurring in the US or Canada.

<sup>2</sup> The author was a Canadian-educated veterinarian who was given the opportunity for postgraduate study at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1970s, and then proceeded to be hired by two other universities (Cornell and the University of Wisconsin-Madison) later in his career.

### **KEYWORDS:**

Deans of Veterinary Medicine  
Foreign educated Deans of Veterinary Medicine  
History of Veterinary Colleges  
Law, James  
Lyman, Richard P.  
Detmers, Heinrich J.  
Nelson, Sofus B.  
Stalker, Milliken  
Smith, Andrew  
Schoenleber, Francis  
Cary, Charles Allen  
Glover, George H.  
Francis, Mark

### **TOPIC:**

History of Veterinary Medicine

### **LEADING QUESTION:**

When did North American-educated veterinarians start leading North American veterinary colleges?

### **META-SUMMARY:**

As veterinary colleges took root in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it took only a short time before leadership of those colleges came from North America rather than from Europe.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

*Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine* is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.